

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 985
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: LEVESQUE UNEASY WITH LANGUAGE LEGISLATION

REF: QUEBEC 0174

1. PREMIER LEVESQUE TOLD PRESS CONFERENCE YESTERDAY THAT GOVERNMENT'S FRENCH-LANGUAGE CHARTER (BILL ONE) MAKES HIM UNEASY. UNLIKE BILL'S SPONSOR CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT MINISTER CAMILLE LAURIN WHO CALLED THE BILL A CAPITAL MOMENT IN HISTORY OF QUEBEC, LEVESQUE CALLED IT HUMILIATING TO HAVE TO INTRODUCE LANGUAGE LEGISLATION. PREMIER IS LOOKING FORWARD TO THE DAY LEGISLATION CAN BE RESCINDED. THAT DAY WOULD COME, HE SAID, WHEN PQ ACHIEVES INDEPENDENCE. AT THAT TIME, "NINE TENTHS OF THE REASONS FOR HAVING THE LAW IN THE FIRST PLACE WOULD BE ELIMINATED." PREMIER EMPHASIZED HOWEVER THAT CHARTER WAS NECESSARY TO PROTECT FRENCH CULTURE AS LONG AS QUEBEC OPERATES IN PROVINCIAL CONTEXT. PREMIER SAID HE WAS WORRIED ABOUT BILL AND HE DISCUSSED WELL-KNOWN FACT THAT CABINET REMAINS DIVIDED ON SEVERAL CLAUSES IN LAW. LEVESQUE SAID CERTAIN MEMBERS OF PARTY ARE TOO INTENSELY PREOCCUPIED WITH SMALL DETAILS IN BILL AS IF THEY EXPECTED QUEBEC TO REMAIN A PROVINCE FOREVER. A WALL

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OF PAPER AND RULES COULD GIVE PROVINCIAL QUEBEC LINGUISTIC PROTECTION THAT WOULD NOT BE NEEDED IN A SOVEREIGN STATE. PREMIER RECOGNIZED LEGISLATION MIGHT DAMAGE HIS ADMINISTRATION AS IT HAS PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS AND HINTED MORE BROADLY THAN EVER THAT THERE WILL BE SOME SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES IN LEGISLATION BEFORE IT BECOMES LAW.

2. LAURIN, WHO IS LEADER OF HARD LINERS ON LANGUAGE QUESTION IN CABINET AS WELL AS BEING AUTHOR OF BILL, TOLD AUDIENCE LAST NIGHT THAT CHARTER IS DESIGNED TO MAKE QUEBEC A FRENCH COUNTRY--"IN A NORMAL COUNTRY, THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE LANGUAGE, THAT OF THE MAJORITY." LEGISLATION WAS NECESSARY BECAUSE FRENCH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE HAVE A LOT OF CATCHING UP TO DO. HE SAID LEVESQUE WAS RIGHT TO SAY IT WAS HUMILIATING TO LEGISLATE BUT IT WAS "NECESSARY BECAUSE THE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE EXCEPTIONAL." HOWEVER, LAURIN TOLD LE SOLEIL YESTERDAY THAT GOQ WAS READY TO AMEND BOTH THE FRENCH LANGUAGE CHARTER AND THE QUEBEC HUMAN RIGHTS CHARTER IF THAT WAS THE ONLY WAY TO ASSURE THEIR COMPATABILITY AND EQUAL IMPORTANCE. (SOME HAVE USED ARGUMENT THAT HUMAN RIGHTS CHARTER--PASSED IN 1975--GIVES ANGLOPHONES BASIC RIGHTS WHICH BILL ONE VIOLATES.)

3. COMMENT: AS WE HAVE REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, CABINET HAS ALWAYS BEEN PROFOUNDLY SPLIT OVER ATTITUDE TO TAKE TOWARD LANGUAGE PROBLEM. LAURIN IS WIDELY SAID TO BE FANATIC ON SUBJECT AND HE HAS APPARENTLY CARRIED CABINET MAJORITY AGAINST WISHES OF MODERATES LIKE LEVESQUE, PARIZEAU, AND THE TWO MORINS. LATTER CLEARLY HOPE THAT PUBLIC HEARINGS WILL GENERATE SUFFICIENT PRESSURE FOR SOME AMENDMENTS TO COUNTERBALANCE STRONG PRESSURES NOT TO CHANGE BILL FROM ARDENT NATIONALISTS. AS THE COMMANDING GENERAL OF THE MOVEMENT, LEVESQUE MUST THINK NOT ONLY ABOUT WINNING REFERENDUM BUT ENTICING ENGLISH CANADA INTO AN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION AFTERWARD. HE KNOWS PROBLEMS HARSH LANGUAGE LEGISLATION COULD PROVOKE IN FUTURE AND WISHES MODIFY BILL ONE. THERE ARE RUMORS LAURIN AND OTHER HARD LINERS HAVE THREATENED RESIGN FROM GOVERNMENT SHOULD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PM INSIST ON SIGNIFICANT MODIFICATION OF LANGUAGE POLICY. THIS EMOTIONALLY CHARGED ISSUE REMAINS ONE WHICH COULD PROVOKE FIRST SERIOUS CRISIS WITHIN GOVERNMENT IF IT IS MISHANDLED.
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